Scripture John 1:1-18 — 6/—/60

Christian Fundamentals C—

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND SIXTY YEARS AGO, A BABY WAS BORN IN THE RELATIVELY INSIGNIFICANT ROMAN PROVINCE OF JUDEA, IN THE TINY TOWN OF BETHLEHEM. THE SON OF A CARPENTER HE WAS RAISED IN THE TRADITIONAL JEWISH WAY AND OBVIOUSLY FULFILLED A NORMAL CHILDHOOD. WHEN HE WAS THIRTY HE ASSUMED, LIKE MANY OTHERS OF HIS TIME, THE ROLE OF PROPHET, TEACHER AND HEALER AND AFTER A SHORT CAREER HE WAS EXECUTED AS A POLITICAL INSURGENT. HIS FOLLOWERS, SHORTLY THEREAFTER, CLAIMED THAT NOT ONLY HAD HE RISEN FROM THE DEAD, BUT THAT HE WAS THE MESSIAH—THE ANNOINTED ONE OF THE LORD.

IN TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA, IN SUBURBAN CHICAGO, IT IS VERY ~~XXXXX~~ EASY TO ALLOW THE CRUCIAL AND ALL IMPORTANT STORY AND TEACHINGS OF JESUS CHRIST TO BECOME FADED AND EVEN NON EXISTENT IN LIGHT OF A MYRIAD OF <u>OTHER</u> THINGS TO DO AND CONSIDER. OFTEN TIMES CHURCH ACTIVITIES, FUN AND FELLOWSHIP,—PICNICS SEEM TO OVERSHADOW THE REAL REASON FOR THE VERY EXISTENCE OF OUR FAITH <u>AND</u> OUR CHURCH.

IN LIEU OF THIS WE ARE OBLIGATED TO RETURN CONTINUOUSLY TO THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF OUR LORD, NEVER CEASING TO SEARCH THEM FOR NEW, DEEPER MEANING AND INSPIRATION. IT is no secret that Christianity IS ABORTED AND MISUNDERSTOOD BY A LARGE NUMBER OF BELIEVERS—AND I THINK IT IS FAIR TO SAY THAT THE REASON FOR THIS LIES IN THE FACT THAT SLOWLY BUT SURELY THE VERY BRANCHES AND TRUNK OF THE FAITH HAVE BECOME OBSCUREDD AMONG THE THICK FOLIAGE. IN

THE GAME OF FOOTBALL EVERY PRACTICE SESSION BEGINS WITH A REVIEW OF FUNDAMENTALS, WHETHER THE TEAM BE A JUNIOR HIGH TEAM OR THE CLEVELAND BROWNS. IF YOU WILL OVERLOOK THE CRUDE ANALOGY I THINK THE POINT IS CLEAR--WE MUST NEVER FAIL TO REVIEW CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALS --THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF JESUS THE CHRIST.

IT IS MY ENTIRE PURPOSE THIS MORNING TO REVIEW A FEW OF THESE FUNDAMENTALS, THAT WE MAY BE BOTH ENRICHED AND BETTER ABLE TO INDIVIDUALLY INTERPRET THEM IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

THE POINT AT WHICH I HAVE CHOSEN TO BEGIN IS THE HISTORICAL OCCURENCE$ OF A MAN--JESUS OF NAZARETH. THE LIFE LIVED BY THIS MAN AND HIS ETHICAL TEACHINGS OBVIOUSLY ARE NOT ENOUGH TO MERIT HIS ROLE AS THE FOUNDER OF CHRISTIANITY. OTHER MEN THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE followed EQUALLY PURE AND HOLY LIVES AND HAVE TAUGHT DOCTRINES EQUALLY AS GODLY AND RIGHTEOUS --PLATO, SOCRATES, FRANCES OF ASSISI, ALBERT SCHWEITZER--TO NAME A FEW.

SURELY JESUS OF NAZARETH WAS A MAN WITH THE SAME CHARACTERISTICS, EMOTIONS AND DRIVES AS OTHER MEN. HE ATE, DRANK, SLEPT, BECAME ANGRY, DISGUSTED, COMPASSIONATE JUST AS WE ALL DO. ~~WHERE~~ CHRISTIANITY RADICALLY CLAIMS HIM AS LORD IS IN THE BELIEF IN THE INCRANATION. PUTTING IT AS SIMPLY AND EARTHY AS IS POSSIBLE--JESUS THE MAN WAS ALSO GOD, THE INCARNATE SON, THE WORD MADE FLESH. THIS LOGICAL PARADOX HAS BEEN A STUMBLING BLOCK THROUGHOUT THE AGES AND STILL IS, CONSCIOUSLY OR UNCONSCIOUSLY FOR

up to this pt. in J.C.'s life- he is much like other men
where

MANY A CHRISTIAN. IN THE FOURTH AND FIFTH CENTURIES CHRISTIAN MEN TRIED TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE BY CLAIMING THAT THE SPIRIT OF GOD WAS AMONG THEM IN THE FORM OF JESUS, THAT HIS MATERIAL BODY WAS ACTUALLY NOT A PART OF HIS ESSENCE. A FIFTH CENTURY WORK OF ART CLEARLY ILLUSTRATES THIS EVASION OF JESUS'S HUMANITY BY POR* TRAYING THE SPIRITUAL --THE REAL, CHRIST, OBSERVING THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE MAN JESUS FROM ANOTHER HILL.

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANITY, PARTICULARLY AROUND THE TURN OF THE CENTURY TRIED TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM BY DESCRIBING JESUS AS A GOOD MAN, ETHICALLY THE BEST MAN THAT EVER LIVED. IN HIS LIFE WAS SEEN THE ULTIMATE REALITY OF LOVE--WHICH CHRISTIANS MUST IMITATE.

BOTH OF THESE ANSWERS ARE DRASTICALLY INADEQUATE BECAUSE BOTH NEGLECT AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE VALID BELIEF ABOUT THE NATURE OF JESUS. THE ONE FAILS TO RECO* NIZE HIS COMPLETE "HUMANESS"--THE OTHER HIS COMPLETE "DEVINENESS."

WHEN APPROACHING THIS PROBLEM ONE MUST READILY RECOGNIZE THE FINITENESS OF HIS OWN REASON. THE INCARNATION CAN NEVER BE EXPLAINED RATIONALLY--NOR CAN IT BE IGNORED. THE BEST WE CAN DO, IN OUR STARTING POINT IN CHRISTIANITY--AS OUR LOGIC BECOMES MORE INADE* QUATE TO DEAL JUSTLY WITH THE ISSUE--IS TO REALIZE THAT THE INCARNATION IS A WORK OF GOD--SIMPLY NOT AVAILABLE IN ITS ENTIRETY TO THE FINITE MIND. OUR STARTING AND BEGIN* ING POINT MUST BE --IN THE EMPHATIC WORDS OF THE NICENE CREED--THAT JESUS CHRIST WAS

VERY GOD AND VERY MAN.

IN THIS UNIQUE ROLE AS GOD'S INCARNATION JESUS MADE MANY RADICAL DEMANDS AND PROMISES. THESE DEMANDS AND PROMISES ARE FAMILIAR TO YOU ALL--BUT LIKE ALL OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE--ARE SUBJECT TO CONSTANT ABUSE, EXAGGERATION AND ABORTION.

THE OCCURRENCE OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE LIMITS OF TIME AND SPACE POINTS TO THE AWEING FACT THAT GOD HAS ACTED IN HISTORY. IF WE ACCEPT THIS FACT WE HAVE AUTOMATICALLY SHUT OUT ALL OTHER RELIGIONS FROM THE REALM OF VALIDITY. IF THE ONE GOD HAS ACTED WITHIN THE LIMITS OF HUMAN PERCEPTION --THERE CAN BE NO OTHER WAY --ONLY THE WAY REVEALED IN THIS ACT. IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE THE CHRISTIANS GOD WAS WELCOME AT ALL TIMES TO JOIN THE GODS OF THE STATE. AS YOU WELL KNOW THE EARLY CHRISTIANS REALIZED THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THIS OFFER. BECAUSE GOD ACTED IN HISTORY, BECAUSE THE CHRIST LIVED AMONG THEM--THEY COULD RECOGNIZE NO OTHER DIETY. THIS SITUATION IS APPARENT IN CERTAIN CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TODAY. A FAMILIAR REMARK IN MANY A DISCUSSION OF RELIGION IS THAT "--ALL RELIGIONS MEAN THE SAME THING--MOSLEMS, BUDDAHIST, HINDUS, CHRISTIANS--ARE ALL STRIVING FOR THE SAME THING, AND ARE WORSHIPPING THE SAME GOD--UNDER DIFFERENT NAMES." THIS APPEASING AND APPEALING ATTITUDE IS SIMPLY NOT CHRISTIAN. THE EXISTENCE OF JESUS CHRIST IS OUR PROMISE THAT THE WAY, THE ONLY WAY HAS BEEN REVEALED TO US BY THE ONE AND ONLY LORD.

JESUS PROMISES CONCERNING THE RESULTS OF ACCEPTANCE OF HIMSELF AS THE SON OF GOD HAVE BEEN IGNORED BY MANY AND INFLATED BY ~~MANY~~ many. WHAT HE OFFERED TO MEN WAS LIFE--A NEW LIFE OF UNDERSTANDING, HUMILITY--AND RECOGNITION OF AN EVER PRESENT FORGIVING GOD.

THE DEMANDS JESUS MADE IN HIS SERMONS RECORDED IN THE GOSPELS ARE MOST PERTINENT TO ANY PERSON WHO CALLS HIMSELF CHRISTIAN. HUNDREDS OF BOOKS HAVE BEEN WRITTEN DESCRIBING THE CHRSITIAN ETHIC, MILLIONS OF MEN HAVE ATTEMPTED IN MILLIONS OF DIFFERENT WAYS TO PRACTICE THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC. CHRIST'S DEMANDS HAVE BEEN BOILED DOWN TO LOVE FOR ALL, TO DOING UNTO OTHERS AS YOU WISH THEM TO DO TO YOU, TO CONQUERING MANKIND IN HIS NAME; TO REFUSING TO PARTICIPATE IN ANY TYPE OF ARMED VIOLENCE. FOR ME TO STAND HERE AND TELL YOU HOW CHRIST'S DEMANDS SHOULD MATERIALIZE IN YOUR RESPECTIVE LIVES WOULD BE VAIN AND ALSO QUITE ILLEGITIMATE. AGAIN WHAT I HOPE TO DO IS POINT TO THE STARTING POINT,-IN LIGHT OF JESUS'S TEACHING-THE PLACE WHERE ONE MUST BEGIN IF HE IS TO UNDERSTAND THE NEW TESTAMENT DEMANDS.

THE INEVITABLE SPRING BOARD IS THE FACT THAT MAN IS SINFUL. THROUGHOUT HISTORY OUTSTANDING MEN HAVE REALIZED AND EXPRESSED IN DIFFERENT WAYS THE HORRIFYING FACT THAT MAN IS BASICALLY EVIL-THAT HE DESPERATELY NEEDS HELP. SOMEHOW THIS VERY CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH (OR BETTER YET) THE VERY REASON FOR IT IS RARELY RECOGNIZED AND UNDERSTOOD BY CHRISTIAN MEN. IN THE SURGE OF OPTIMISM THAT OCCURRED AFTER THE

FRENCH REVOLUTION AND ENLIGHTENMENT, AND WHICH HAS VERY RECENTLY SUBSIDED A BIT, THE DOMINANT BELIEF WAS THAT MAN WAS BASICALLY GOOD, THAT THROUGH EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT HE COULD ULTIMATELY ACHIEVE PERFECTION. TO THIS FANTASYIC CHRISTIANITY MUST SHOUT A UNANIMOUS NO. VERY RECENTLY THE AGE OLD CHRISTIAN TRUTH OF SINFUL MAN HAS BEEN AFFIRMED IN ACADEMIC CIRCLES, IN THE FIELD OF DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY. IN PROBING THE DEPTHS OF THE HUMAN MIND LEADING SCHOOLS OF PSYCHOLOGISTS ARE UNANIMOUS IN CLAIMING THAT MAN IS PRONE TO EVIL, DESTRUCTION, PERVERSION OR HOW EVER YOU WANT IT. I ADD THIS JUST AS A SIDE NOTE FOR SINCE JESUS SAID ALL MEN NEED FORGIVENSSS AND PAUL THAT ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALLEN SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD, CHRISTIANS HAVE KNOWN THE TERRIBLE TRUTH.

A POPULAR CONCEPTION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS TO FOLLOW A SET OF RULES--THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT OR OTHERS. IF ONE BREAKS NO RULES HE AVOIDS SIN. BEFORE WE LOOK AT JESUS'S DEMANDS WE MUST REALIZE THAT TO BE HUMAN IS TO BE SINFUL. PRIDE, JEALOUSIE, COMPLETE AND UTTER INFATUATION WITH THE SELF ARE THE INHERENT PLAGUES OF HUMANITY--THOSE THAT MAKE US SINFUL.

IN JESUS DAY REIGHTEOUNESS WAS INDENTIFIED WITH OBEDIANCE TO THE JEWISH LAW BY A MAJORITY OF HIS LISTENERS AND SPECIFICALLY A BODY OF STRICT RULE BOOKERS CALLED PHARISEES. AGAINST THESE PEOPLE HE WAS MOST HARSH--EXPECTING SALVATION TO BE EARNED BY FOLLOWING RULES WAS HYPOCRISY OF THE WRUST SORTS. EVEN ACTS THAT ARE OUTWARDLY GOOD ORIGINATE IN A HEART FILLED WITH EVIL.

JESUS DID NOT DISCARD THE LAW AS MEANINGLESS. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT IS AN ENLARGEMENT OF THE OLD JEWISH LAW. HE SAW THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW IN QUITE A DIFFERENT LIGHT FROM THE PHARISEES. FOR JESUS AND ~~XXX~~ FOR ALL CHRISTIANS, THE LAW, OR A CODE OF ETHICS IS A GUIDE POST, A POINTER TO OUR HOPELESS SINFULNESS.

JESUS REALIZED THAT THE LAW AS SUCH WAS EASY TO FULFILL AND THUSLY HE DUG DEEPER DEMANDING MORE AND MORE PERSISTENTLY POINTINGOUT THE BLUNT FACT THAT ALL MEN ARE SINNERS, THAT REGARDLESS OF THE STRENOUSNESS AND SINCERITY WITH WHICH THEY FOLLOW THE RULES THEY CANNOT ESCAPE THEIR SINFUL NATURE. TO THE COMMANDMENT "THOU SHALT NOT KILL"--HE ADDED THE CONDEMNATION--THAT ANGER IS A SIN AS IS NO LESS EVIL THAN KILLING. TO THE COMMANDMENT "THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY" HE ADDED THE CONDEMNING NOTE THAT LUSTFUL THINKING IS AS SINFUL AS THE ACT OF ADULTERY ITSELF. LET US FACE, IN TERMS OF THE LAW, THE FACTS --WE ARE ALL ADULTERS AND MUDERERS.

IF ONE WERE TO STOP AT THIS POINT THE SITUATION WOULD SEEM HOPELESS AND TO SAY THE LEAST UNBEARABLE. STOPPING here WOULD SEEM TO MAKE A CHRISTIAN LIFE A COMPLETE IMPOSSIBILITY. THE QUESTION INEVITABLY ARISES THAT IF WE ARE SINFUL AND CANNOT IMPROVE--WHY TRY, WHY BE A CHRISTIAN. AND HERE JESUS CHRIST OFFERS MAN THE MOST JOYFUL AND RADICAL MESSAGE POSSIBLE--IN THE SIMPLE ASSURANCE THAT OUR HEAVENLY FATHER WILL FORGIVE US. ALTHOUGH HIS ETHIC APPEARS TO BE AN IMPOSSIBILITY WE SHOULD NOT DISPAIR. BEING A CHRISTIAN IS GROUNDED IN THE RECOGNITION OF OUR SINFULNESS, RECOGNITION OF THE

FUTILITY OF ALL OUR ATTEMPTS FOR SURELY WE WILL FALL SHORT AND FINALLY RECOGNITION OF THE DIRE NEED FOR THE FORGIVENESS. CERTAINLY WE ARE GUILTY--BUT JUST AS CERTAINLY THERE IS ONE WHO FORGIVES.

the incarnate Lord
BRIDGED
JESUS CHRIST ~~XXXXXX~~ THIS GAP BETWEEN HOLY LORD AND SINFUL MAN, SIMULTANEOUSLY POINTING OUT OUR GUILT AND OFFERING US FORGIVENSS. MANS ONLY OBLIGATION IS TO PROSTRATE HIMSELF BEFORE HIS CREATOR, IN HUMILITY AND PENETENCE, AND ASK THE FORGIVENESS HE DESERVES SO LITTLE. GOD'S GRACE, FORGIVENSS AND LIFE EVERLASTING ARE FREE TO ALL FOR THE ASKING.

AMEN

Descend on us O Lord. Instill in us thy saving Grace. Help us overcome our sinful selves - that we may better serve thee. Amen

BENEDICTION

NOW TO HIM WHO IS ABLE TO KEEP YOU FROM FALLING AND TO PRESENT YOU WITHOUT BLEMISH BEFORE THE PRESENCE OF HIS GLORY WITH REJOICING, TO THE ONLY GOD, OUR SAVIOR ~~XXXXX~~ TRHOUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, BE GLORY, MAJESTY, DOMINION, AND AUTHORITY, BEFORE ALL TIME AND NOW AND FOREVER. AMEN